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19th Century Paisley Shawl Collection Debuts at UNH Museum

By [Lori Gula](#)
UNH News Bureau

May 2, 2002

DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire Museum brings the 19th century European love for paisley shawls back to life with its new exhibition "Daisy's Paisleys: 19th Century Shawls from the Daisy Deane Williamson Collection."

The exhibit runs until July 26.

Daisy Deane Williamson of Durham was a home demonstration leader for the New Hampshire Cooperative Extension from 1920 to 1942. She lectured on a myriad of home economics topics and used her shawl collection to educate about the history of shawls.

Williamson began collecting shawls after receiving an antique wedding shawl as a gift. Her interest in paisley is apparent -- one third of the collection is paisley-related, including examples of various techniques and designs. She died in 1942 and bequeathed her shawl collection to UNH. At the time of her death, her collection numbered 160 shawls.

"With the help of an assistant curator of textiles from the Museum of Fine Arts, we were able to identify a dozen shawls that represent the later period (1840-70) in production and fashion. And what we know about Daisy Deane Williamson we have learned from a detailed index of the history of New Hampshire's Cooperative Extension, prepared and donated to the University Archives by Ruth Stimson, Class of 1940," says Dale Valena, museum curator.

The 19th century European love for paisley shawls is thought to have started when employees of the British East India Trading Company brought them home from Kashmir, India, as gifts to their wives. In Kashmir, the soft "pashmina" underfleece from Central Asian goats

was spun, dyed and woven into colorful shawls. Incorporated in the shawl design was the symbolic "tree of life" motif, the buta. When the European weaving industry started manufacturing imitative versions of Kashmir shawls at the turn of the 19th century, the buta motif was transformed into a pine pattern.

Paisley, Scotland, became the largest manufacturer of shawls; hence the pine motif became associated with Paisley. In the 1830s, Paisley began producing record numbers of paisley shawls, making them affordable to most middle-class women.

The introduction of the bustled dress in approximately 1870 triggered the demise of the paisley shawl industry. This exhibition represents the later period of the industry, from 1840 to 1870, when shawls complemented the bell-shape of the fashionable crinoline dress.

Museum hours:

During the fall and spring semesters: Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday 1-5 p.m. Between semesters and during the summer: Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The museum also may be open by appointment. The museum is located within the Milne Special Collections and Archives area on level 1 of the Dimond Library.

EDITORS AND NEWS DIRECTORS: For more information about the exhibit, contact Dale Valena, museum curator, at 862-1081 or visit <http://www.izaak.unh.edu/specoll/museum/index.htm>.

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